

**Testimony of
Lawrence J. Korb**

**Before the
House Armed Services Committee
July 27, 2007**

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Chairman Skelton, Ranking Member Hunter, and members of the House Armed Services Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you with these genuine war heroes to discuss the situation in Iraq and the current state of the nation's ground forces. I cannot think of more critical issues facing the nation at this time.

After more than four years of being engaged in combat operations in Iraq and six and a half in Afghanistan, America's ground forces are stretched to their breaking point. Not since the aftermath of the Vietnam War has the U.S. Army been so depleted. In Iraq, more than 3,600 troops have been killed and more than 25,000 wounded. The Army is severely overstretched and its overall readiness has significantly declined. As Gen. Colin Powell noted last December well before the surge, the active Army is about broken, and as Gen. Barry McCaffrey pointed out when we testified together before the Senate Armed Services Committee in April, "the ground combat capability of the U.S. armed forces is shot." The Marine Corps is suffering from the same strains as the Army, and the situation for the Army National Guard is even worse.

Meanwhile, the combat readiness of the total Army (active units, the National Guard, and the Army Reserve) is in tatters. In the beginning of this year, Gen. Peter Pace, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, conducted his own review of our military posture and concluded that there has been an overall decline in military readiness and that there is a significant risk that the U.S. military would not be able to respond effectively if it were confronted with another crisis. The simple fact is that the United States currently does not have enough troops who are ready and available for potential contingency missions in places like Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, or anywhere else. For example, when this surge is completed all four brigades of the 82nd Airborne will be deployed, leaving us with no strategic ground reserve. Even at the height of the Korean War, we always have kept one brigade in the continental United States. But it is not simply that so many of our soldiers are committed to Iraq, but that so much of the Army's and the Marine Corps' equipment is committed to Iraq as well.

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The decision to escalate or to “surge” five more brigades and a total of 30,000 more ground troops into Iraq has put additional strain on the ground forces and threatens to leave the United States with a broken force that is unprepared to deal with other threats around the world.

But the situation facing the ground forces is more than just a strategic crisis—it is a moral one as well. More and more of the burden of the war in Iraq is falling on the men and women in uniform who volunteered to serve this country, and we are putting them in harm’s way without all the preparation and dwell time they deserve.

To meet the manpower requirements called for in the president’s latest escalation, Army and Marine Corps commanders are being forced to cut corners on training and equipment, thus putting additional stress on those in uniform. The unprecedented decision by the Bush administration to extend the tours of Army brigades currently deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan from 12 months to 15 months—something that was not even done in Vietnam, when we had over 500,000 troops on the ground, or in Korea, where we had over 300,000—is the latest illustration of the unreasonable stress being placed on our ground forces.

Before commenting on the recommendations that this committee is considering to relieve the burden on those serving, let me discuss the misuse of the all-volunteer military in Iraq, the rapid pace of deployments, the inadequate amount of dwell time between deployments that is currently being provided to the ground forces, and the impact this is having on the ground forces and their families.

I. Ground Forces Overstretched – Passing the Burden to the Troops

Iraq and the Misuse of the All-Volunteer Military.

The current use of the ground forces in Iraq represents a complete misuse of the all-volunteer military. America’s all-volunteer Army, made up of well-equipped and highly trained active-duty soldiers, backed up by a ready reserve, was designed to act as an

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initial response force, a force that would be able to repel and counter aggression. If America ever found itself in a protracted ground war, or was forced to act against an existential threat, the all-volunteer force was to act as a bridge to re-instating conscription. This is why we require young men to register when they turn 18.

The all-volunteer force, particularly the Army component, as Gen. John Abizaid, former head of the Central Command, noted last fall, was not “built to sustain a long war.” Therefore, if the United States is going to have a significant component of its ground forces in Iraq over the next five, 10, 15, or 30 years, then the only correct course is for the president and those supporting this open-ended and escalated presence in Iraq to call for re-instating the draft. That would be the responsible path.¹

In my view, however, this would be a mistake on par with the initial invasion of Iraq. Instead, I believe the United States should set a firm timetable for the gradual redeployment of U.S. forces over the next 10 to 12 months. During that time the United States should work to train and support Iraqi security forces and the Iraqi government while gradually handing over responsibility for security to the Iraqis. This action should be backed up with a diplomatic surge in which the United States would engage all countries in the region. There is no guarantee that this approach will be effective in stabilizing Iraq or the region. In fact, given the misleading justifications for the initial invasion and the way in which the Bush administration has conducted the war, there are no good options left. But I believe that this course, a strategic redeployment and a diplomatic surge, as well as a strategic reset of our entire Middle East policy, provides the best chance for stabilizing the region as well as mitigating the impact of Iraq on the ground forces and U.S. national security. As Gen. Maxwell Taylor noted some three decades ago, “we sent the Army to Vietnam to save Vietnam; we withdrew the Army to save the Army.” The same is even more true in Iraq today.

¹ Lawrence Korb and Max Bergmann, “Bush’s Draft Dodge,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 2007.

Rapid Pace of Deployments.

Following Sept. 11, the Bush administration had a tremendous opportunity to increase the size of the ground forces. Unfortunately, the president and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld pursued a misguided policy. Instead of increasing the size of the ground forces, they actually sought to cut them. This error was compounded when the Bush administration diverted its efforts from Afghanistan and proceeded to undertake an ill-advised and unnecessary invasion of Iraq. This strategic mistake has allowed the Taliban and Al Qaeda to reconstitute in Afghanistan and Pakistan, weakened the standing of the United States in the world, and has undermined the nation's efforts in the fight against the radical extremists responsible for the attacks on 9/11.

Today there is little doubt that the ground forces are overstretched. Currently, the Army is being deployed at a rate not seen since the advent of the all-volunteer Army. In early March, the Center for American Progress released a study chronicling the effects that sustained deployments in Iraq are having on the Army.² By analyzing every Army brigade, we were able to convey the strain and fatigue placed on the force and illustrate its implications for our nation's national security. The facts that we compiled are troubling:

Of the Army's 44 combat brigades, all but the First Brigade of the Second Infantry Division, which is permanently based in South Korea, have served at least one tour. Of the remaining 43:

- 12 Brigades have had one tour in Iraq or Afghanistan
- 20 Brigades have had two tours in Iraq or Afghanistan
- 9 Brigades have had three tours in Iraq or Afghanistan
- 2 Brigades have had four tours in Iraq or Afghanistan

² Lawrence Korb, Peter Rundlet, Max Bergmann, Sean Duggan, and Peter Juul, "Beyond the Call of Duty: A Comprehensive Review of the Overuse of the Army in Iraq," Center for American Progress, March 2006.

Reserve Component.

The reserve component is also in tatters. Lt. General Steven Blum, the head of the National Guard Bureau, stated that the National Guard is “in an even more dire situation than the active Army but both have the same symptoms; I just have a higher fever.” The Pentagon has had to increasingly employ the National Guard and Reserve in order to meet demands on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan.

To make matters worse, the Pentagon has notified four National Guard brigades to prepare again for duty in Iraq. Some 12,000 troops are scheduled to be deployed to Iraq early next year. This would be the first time that a full Guard combat brigade would be sent to Iraq for a second tour. These deployments are becoming increasingly necessary because the regular Army is not large enough to handle the mission in Iraq on its own. Originally these Guard units were to serve no more than 24 months total. However, these units and others in the Guard have already served 18 months—with training time and time in Iraq or Afghanistan—and now they are looking at least another 12 months in Iraq.

With the Pentagon straining to keep force levels high in Iraq, the Guard and Reserve are being used as an operational reserve, rather than a strategic reserve as was intended when we created the all-volunteer force, alternating deployments with the active force. The nation’s current reliance on the Guard to fight two major ground wars is unprecedented.

Since 2001:

- Every Enhanced Brigade has been deployed overseas at least once and two have already been deployed twice.³
- Eleven have deployed to Iraq, three to Afghanistan, and two to the Balkans. Currently two of the Enhanced Brigades are in Iraq and one has just returned from

³ Lawrence Korb, Sean Duggan, “Caught off Guard,” *Center for American Progress*, May 2007.

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Afghanistan—a brigade combat team from the Minnesota Guard has been in Iraq since March 2006 and has been extended through this month.⁴

- All told, more than 417,000 National Guard and Reservists, or about 80 percent of the members of the Guard and Reserve, have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, with an average of 18 months per mobilization. Of these, more than 84,200, or 20 percent, have been deployed more than once.⁵

Guard Units that are scheduled to be deployed later this year include the 39th Infantry Brigade, the 45th Infantry Brigade, the 76th Infantry Brigade, and the 37th Infantry Brigade Combat Team. None of these units has received proper dwell time according to the Pentagon's previous policy limiting involuntary mobilization of Guard members to no more than 24 months every five years. Under the Bush administration's revised rules announced last January, these units can be called up involuntarily and without proper rest and training. A closer look at these four brigades reveals significant shortcomings:

- The 39th Infantry Brigade from Arkansas returned from Iraq in March 2005 after a one-year tour in country and 18 months on active duty. It is scheduled to go back to Iraq in December of this year, about two and a half years after returning. Of particular concern to Capt. Christopher Heathscott, a spokesman for the Arkansas National Guard, is that the reality of going to Iraq next year could cause some Arkansas reservists not to re-enlist this year. "Over the next year roughly one-third of the soldiers in the 39th will have their enlistment contracts expire or be eligible for retirement," Captain Heathscott said. Moreover, the brigade is short 600 rifles.⁶
- The 45th Infantry Brigade from Oklahoma, which returned from a 12-month deployment to Afghanistan in December of 2004, it is now slated to go back to

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Website of House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, <http://majorityleader.house.gov/docUploads/Iraqbythenumbers031907.pdf>.

⁶ David S. Cloud, "Units of National Guard May Return to Iraq Early," *New York Times*, February 22, 2007.

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Iraq in January of 2008, about three years after returning from Afghanistan—even though one-third of the unit lacks standard issue M-4 rifles.⁷

- The 76th Infantry Brigade from Indiana, returned from a year-long deployment to Afghanistan in August 2005. It is now scheduled to go to Iraq in January 2008, some 29 months after coming back from Afghanistan. Major General R. Martin Umbarger, head of the Indiana National Guard, has recently commented that “what keeps me up at night is, I think I am able to surge...for the normal disaster, but if I needed to deploy every bit of my soldiers and airmen, I know for a fact I do not have enough equipment.”⁸
- The 37th Infantry Brigade Combat Team from Ohio, which returned from a six-month deployment to Kosovo in February 2005, it is now scheduled to go to Iraq for a year-long deployment in January 2008, less than three years after returning from its Kosovo deployment. Mark Wayda, director of the government and public affairs office for the Ohio National Guard, recently noted that “there’s a whole host of things the National Guard just doesn’t have or doesn’t have of sufficient quantity to do their missions.”⁹

Sustained Combat and Inadequate Rest.

The task of sustaining or increasing troop levels in Iraq has forced the Army to frequently violate its own deployment policy. Army policy mandates that, after 12 months of deployment in a combat zone, troops should receive 24 months at home for recuperation and retraining before returning to combat. According to the Army, after a unit is deployed for one year it should receive one year of recuperation followed by an additional year of training before being redeployed to theater. Even before the surge, the Army had reduced the dwell time, or time between deployments, to one year.

⁷ Oklahoman, February 1, 2007.

⁸ Tyson, Ann Scott “Most National Guard Units Rated Not Ready for Service,” *Washington Post*, March 2, 2007.

⁹ *Plain Dealer*, February 18, 2007.

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To comply with the president's current escalation plan, the Army has been forced to "short cycle" units, or deploy units back into battle with less than two years time for recuperation, rest and training—and in some cases, with less than even nine months. Moreover, at least 10 Army brigades have had their tours in Iraq and Afghanistan extended while abroad. A unit of the second brigade of the first armored division is scheduled to go back to Iraq nine months after returning.

It is also wrong, both militarily and morally, to send troops into a war zone who are not fully combat ready. Three units that are part of this surge show what happens when units do not receive what the Army calls the proper dwell time between deployments.

- The 1st Brigade of the Army's 3rd Infantry Division based at Fort Stewart became the Army's first brigade to be deployed to Iraq for the third time. It was sent over in January 2007 after about a year at home. But, because of its compressed time between deployments, some 150 soldiers joined the unit right out of basic training, too late to participate in the unit training necessary to prepare soldiers to function effectively in Iraq. Unfortunately one of the 18-year-old soldiers, Matthew Zeimer, who joined the unit on Dec. 18, 2006, was killed by friendly fire on Feb. 2 after being at his first combat post for just two hours. He missed the brigade's intensive four-week pre-Iraq training at the national training center at Fort Irwin, California, getting instead a cut-rate 10-day course.
- The 4th Brigade of the Army's 1st Infantry Division based at Fort Reilly was sent to Iraq in February, about a year after it was reactivated. More than half of the brigade's soldiers classified as E-4 or below and are right out of basic training and the bulk of its mid-level non-commissioned officers in the ranks of E-5 and E-6 has no combat experience.
- The 3rd Division's 3rd Brigade was sent back to Iraq this month for the third time after spending less than 11 months at home. In order to meet personnel requirements, the brigade had to send 75 soldiers with medical problems into the

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war zone. These include troops with serious injuries and other medical problems, including GIs who doctors have said are medically unfit for battle. Medical records show that some are too injured to wear their body armor.

This lack of “dwell time” is also taking its toll on morale. Multiple tours and expedited or extended deployments have wreaked havoc in the personal lives of those in uniform, as well as on their families. An Army survey revealed that soldiers are 50 percent more likely to suffer from acute combat stress, which increases the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder, if they serve more than one tour.¹⁰ Divorces, which had hovered in the two percent to three percent range for the Army since 2000, increased in 2004 to six percent among officers and 3.6 percent among enlisted personnel.¹¹

Since the 2003 invasion, the suicide rate among troops deployed for the Iraq war reached its highest point in 2006, according to an Army mental health study.¹² Sometimes the trigger is news of a second or third deployment. Last Christmas, for example, Army Reservist James Dean, who had already served in Afghanistan for 18 months and had been diagnosed with PTSD, was notified that his unit would be sent to Iraq in three weeks, on Jan. 14. According to news reports, Dean barricaded himself in his father’s home with several weapons and threatened to kill himself. After a 14-hour standoff with authorities, Dean was killed by a police officer after he aimed a gun at another officer. As Steve Robinson the Director of Veterans Affairs at Veterans for America explained, “We call that suicide by cop.”¹³

As Lieutenant General William Odom notes,

No U.S. forces have ever been compelled to stay in sustained combat conditions for as long as the Army units have in Iraq. In World War II, soldiers were

¹⁰ Ann Scott Tyson, “Repeat Iraq tours raise risk of PTSD, Army finds,” *The Washington Post*, December 20, 2006.

¹¹ Lizette Alvarez, “Long Iraq Tours Can Make Home a Trying Front,” *New York Times*, February 23, 2007.

¹² Gregg Zoroya, “Suicide Rate Spikes Among Troops Sent to Iraq War,” *USA Today*, December 19, 2006.

¹³ Aaron Glantz, “Iraq Vets Left in Physical and Mental Agony,” *Inter Press Service*, January 4, 2007.

considered combat-exhausted after about 180 days in the line. They were withdrawn for rest periods. Moreover, for weeks at a time, large sectors of the front were quiet, giving them time for both physical and psychological rehabilitation...

In Iraq combat units take over an area of operations and patrol it daily, making soldiers face the prospect of death from an IED or small arms fire or mortar fire several hours each day. Day in and day out for a full year, with only a single two-week break, they confront the prospect of death, losing limbs or eyes, or suffering other serious wounds... The impact on the psyche accumulates, eventually producing what is now called “post traumatic stress disorder.” In other words, they are combat-exhausted to the point of losing effectiveness. The occasional willful killing of civilians in a few cases is probably indicative of such loss of effectiveness. These incidents don’t seem to occur during the first half of a unit’s deployment.¹⁴

Impact on the Ground Forces.

The strain on personnel and the difficulty of recruiting new soldiers in the midst of an unpopular war has forced the Army to relax many of its standards for enlistment and reenlistment and dramatically increase enlistment and recruitment bonuses. These steps will have a long term impact on the Army.

After failing to meet its recruitment target for 2005, the Army raised the maximum age for enlistment from 35 to 40 in January 2006—only to find it necessary to raise it to 42 in June. Basic training, an essential tool for developing and training new recruits, has increasingly become a rubber-stamping ritual. Through the first six months of 2006, only 7.6 percent of new recruits flunked out of basic training, down from 18.1 percent in May 2005.

¹⁴ William Odom, “Supporting the Troops Means Withdrawing Them, *Nieman Watchdog*, July 5, 2007

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Alarming, this drop in basic training attrition coincides with a dramatic lowering of recruitment standards. The number of Army recruits who scored below average on its aptitude test doubled in 2005, and the Army has doubled the number of non-high school graduates it enlisted last year. In 2006, only 81 percent of the new enlistees had high school diplomas, compared to 94 percent before the invasion. Even as more allowances are made, the Government Accountability Office reported that allegations and substantiated claims of recruiter wrongdoing have increased by 50 percent. Last May, for example, the Army signed up an autistic man to become a cavalry scout.

The number of criminal offenders that the Army has allowed in the military—through the granting of “moral waivers”—has also increased significantly. Last year, such waivers were granted to 8,129 men and women—or more than one out of every 10 new Army recruits. That number is up 65 percent since 2003, the year President Bush ordered the invasion of Iraq. This year the situation is even worse. Through the first three quarters of FY 2007, waivers for criminal convictions have risen to 12 percent. In the last three years, more than 125,000 moral waivers have been granted by America’s four military services. A senior NCO involved in recruiting summarized the situation well when he told *The New York Times* on April 9, 2007, “We’re enlisting more dropouts, people with more law violations, lower test scores, more moral issues... We’re really scraping the bottom of the barrel to get people to join.” Private Steven Green, the soldier arrested for his alleged role in the rape of an Iraqi girl and the murder of her family, was allowed to join the Army upon being granted one such moral waiver. Green had legal, educational, and psychological problems, didn’t graduate from high school, and had been arrested several times.

Many of last year’s Army waivers were for serious misdemeanors, like aggravated assault, robbery, burglary, and vehicular homicide. But around 900—double the number in 2003—were for felonies. Worse, the Army does no systematic tracking of recruits with waivers once it signs them up, and it does not always pay enough attention to any adjustment problems.

Overall enlisted retention numbers are adequate. But the Army is keeping its numbers up by increasing financial incentives and allowing soldiers to reenlist early, that is with more than one year left on their current enlistment. Moreover, first term retention for soldiers is off by seven percent.

There are problems with retention in the officer corps as well. Retention among West Point graduates is at its lowest point in 30 years and consequently the Army only has half of the senior Captains it needs. Additionally, the Army's personnel costs continue to increase. Spending on enlistment and recruitment bonuses tripled from \$328 million before the war in Iraq to over \$1 billion in 2006. The incentives for Army Guard and Reserve have grown ten-fold over the same period.

II. The Way Forward.

Congress Can Take Action. The Congress under the constitution is given the power to “make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces.” It is well within Congressional authority to regulate the deployment of U.S. military personnel. According to your Congressional Research Service:

As a matter of historical practice, Congress has occasionally imposed limitations and other requirements on the deployment of U.S. troops, including during wartime. These limitations have been effectuated either through the statutory prohibition on the use of military personnel for a particular purpose, or via the denial of appropriations in support

Examples of past action according to CRS:¹⁵

- 1915 in the Philippines: Congress restricted tours of duty to two years.

¹⁵ Congressional Research Service

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- 1951 during the Korean War: Congress passed the Universal Military Training and Service Act of 1951, which required that active duty personnel receive at least four months of training before being deployed.
- 1985 concerning U.S. forces deployed to NATO countries: stipulated that U.S. force levels should not be higher than 326,414.

Congress should ensure that U.S. forces receive adequate dwell time. Congress should ensure that those who serve get at least an equal amount of time at home as they spend in the combat zone. We have been at war for more than four years in Iraq. We owe it not just to those serving, but to their families as well, to provide them with some stability and to ensure they receive adequate time at home between deployments. Failing to ensure even this minimum amount of dwell time is doing a disservice to our troops. Similarly, Guard and Reserve troops should not be deployed unless they have spent three years at home.

Therefore it is imperative that Congress pass the bill introduced by Congresswoman Tauscher, with the support of other member especially Congressman Price, and the Amendment offered by Chairman Skelton. The bill stipulates that troops that are deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan should receive dwell time that is at least equal or longer than the time that that was spent deployed and that Guard and Reserve units cannot be redeployed if they have deployed at any time during the last three years. Since this bill already relaxes the Pentagon policy of two years dwell time for active duty personnel and no more than one deployment for every five years for Guard and Reserve troops, and provides for a Presidential waiver, it is hard to see why anyone would be opposed. This bill will help protect our ground forces from breaking.

Adopt a Strategy of Strategic Reset. Last month, the Center released its new Iraq policy report, Strategic Reset. The report recognizes that the even with the surge Iraqi government is not meeting its benchmarks, overall violence in the country is not

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declining, and U.S. security is being jeopardized by our continuing large scale presence in Iraq. It therefore calls for the phased redeployment of all U.S. troops from Iraq within twelve months. At the same time, we argue that we must recognize the reality of Iraq's political fragmentation by ending the unconditional training and equipping of Iraq's security forces and shift our reconstruction, governance, and security assistance to localities and regions where it is practical and possible to do so. As we redeploy from Iraq into the region, we will need to initiate a broader regional diplomatic effort to contain Iraq's multiple internal conflicts. We must therefore work with Iraq's neighbors and form working groups on various issues of concern, such as terrorism, refugees, and security. Talking to Iraq's neighbors means talking to our adversaries in Syria and Iran, using the same tough approach we used to deal with the Soviet Union and China during the Cold War. More broadly, the United States needs to develop a strategy to contain and ultimately resolve the conflicts throughout the Middle East – especially the Arab-Israeli conflict. We should appoint a special Middle East envoy to work on the problem, with support from two senior ambassadors, to work on both the Arab-Israeli conflict and Iraq's internal conflicts.

It is imperative that the U.S. take control of its own security and begin planning for a phased redeployment of its forces now. The Tanner-Abercrombie Bill which requires the administration to develop a comprehensive redeployment plan is a necessary first step in that direction and should be adopted.

Twenty-six years ago I was fortunate enough to be confirmed to assume responsibility for the readiness of the Armed Forces. Because of Vietnam and its immediate aftermath, this nation had what the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army called a "hollow army." With the help of Congress, and in particular this committee, we were able to reverse this situation. Successive administrations and Congresses continued to maintain the quality of the force. It is hard to believe that the Bush administration has allowed the readiness of our ground forces to deteriorate so rapidly in so short a time. Therefore Congress and this committee must take the initiative in fixing the problem. The bills you are considering will move us in that direction.